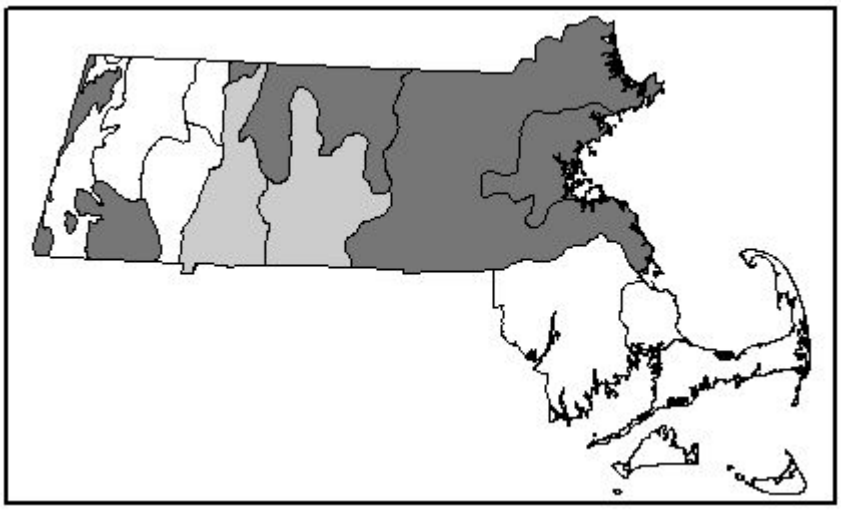
**Community Name:** **ACIDIC ROCK CLIFF COMMUNITY**

**Community Code:** CT2A2A2000

**SRANK:** S4



**Concept:** An open community of extremely sparse scattered vascular plants on ledges and in crevices within a sparsely vegetated vertical substrate of acidic rocks. Lichens are occasionally dense on the cliff face.

**Environmental Setting:** Acidic rock cliffs form on resistant bedrock. Little soil and few nutrients are available to support plants on the acidic cliff faces. Although often cooler and moister than Acidic Rocky Summits because of aspect or shading from surrounding forests, there is a continuum of conditions and Acidic Rock Cliff Communities may be physically below Acidic Rocky Summits and above Acidic Talus Slopes.

**Vegetation Description:** The vascular vegetation is sparse, the plant association not distinctive. Common polypody (*Polypodium virginianum*) and rusty cliff-fern (*Woodsia ilvensis*) are often present in the crevices. Harebell (*Campanula rotundifolia*), bristly sarsaparilla (*Aralia hispida*), marginal wood-fern (*Dryopteris marginalis*), fringed bindweed (*Polygonum cilinode*), stout goldenrod (*Solidago squarrosa*), and Virginia creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*) are common on acidic cliffs, as well as in other sterile acidic conditions. Purple-flowering raspberry (*Rubus odoratus*) occurs on acidic cliffs in the northern and western parts of the state. Trees from the surrounding forest may shade the cliff face; shaded cliffs have less vegetation than sunny occurrences. Surrounding forests are variable: oak forest, northern hardwoods, hemlock, or others throughout the state. Lichens may be abundant on the rock face. Cliffs are small areas within surrounding forest, and reflect the vegetation of the surroundings.

**Associations:**

**Habitat Values for Associated Fauna:** All types of cliffs provide nesting habitat for Ravens (*Corvus corax*) and, in the past, Peregrine Falcons (*Falco peregrinus*) nested on cliffs before being extirpated from Massachusetts in 1955, and the Peregrine Falcons released in urban areas since 1984 have not returned to the natural habitat, although they are breeding in the state. Cliffs were probably the native habitat of the Eastern Phoebe (*Sayornis phoebe*). No mammals, reptiles, or amphibians would be expected on the steep cliff faces.

**Associated Rare Plants:**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| ADLUMIA FUNGOSA | CLIMBING FUMITORY | T |
| ASPLENIUM MONTANUM | MOUNTAIN SPLEENWORT | E |

**Associated Rare Animals:**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| FALCO PEREGRINUS | PEREGRINE FALCON | E |

From: Swain, P.C. & J.B. Kearsley. 2001. Classification of the Natural Communities of Massachusetts. Version 1.3. Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program, Division of Fisheries & Wildlife. Westborough, MA.

| | |
|---|---|
| **Examples with Public Access:** | Known from the towns of Florida, Sandisfield;, New Salem, Leverett, Erving, and Leominster; Mt. Tekoa WMA, Russell; Mt. Everett State Reservation, Mt. Washington. |
| **Threats:** | Rock climbing can break plants off of the cliff face, remove small pockets of soil, and wear lichens off of the rocks. Distinct trails appear on heavily used cliffs. Development in the vicinity of cliffs, most cliffs themselves are seldom directly threatened by development. |
| **Management Needs:** | |
| **Synonyms** | |
| **USNVC/TNC:** | Includes: Asplenium montanum sparsely vegetated Alliance -- Asplenium montanum Sparse Vegetation [CEGL004391]; Includes: Lichen vegetation - Umbilicaria mammulata Nonvascular Alliance -- Umbilicaria mammulata Nonvascular Vegetation [CEGL004387]. |
| **MA (old name):** | SNE ACIDIC CLIFF COMMUNITY. |
| **ME:** | 2001 – Acidic Cliff – Gorge. 1991 - Acidic Cliff Community. |
| **NH:** | [Large open talus] 1994- Acidic Cliff Community. |
| **VT:** | Temperate Acidic Cliff Community. |
| **NY:** | Part of: Cliff Community. |
| **CT:** | |
| **RI:** | |
| **Weatherbee:** | Southern Acidic Cliff Community. |

**Author:** P. Swain **Date:** 3/28/00